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RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 1753  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 000637

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/08/2017  
TAGS: PREL PBTS PHUM AG MO WI  
SUBJECT: POLISARIO AMBASSADOR ON TALKS WITH MOROCCO

Classified By: DCM Thomas F. Daughton; reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) The Polisario was generally satisfied with UNSCR 1754, Polisario Ambassador to Algeria Mohamed Beissat told DCM May 7, but took issue with the resolution's praise for Morocco's "serious and credible" autonomy proposal. Such language would embolden Morocco, Beissat said, to approach the negotiations from a position of confidence that it had U.S. backing, and was also inconsistent with the search for the solution providing for Sahrawi self-determination described in the resolution. Beissat was also disappointed that the resolution referred to "the parties" and not to Morocco and the Polisario specifically. He preferred the wording about the parties in the UNSYG's report to the Council. Beissat said ultimately only the Polisario and Morocco were parties to the dispute, even though he took the DCM's point that one aim of the resolution was to involve neighboring countries in efforts to find a lasting solution.

¶2. (C) Turning to the process by which UNSCR 1754 was adopted, Beissat suggested that the Friends played too great a role in determining the language of the resolution. DCM noted in response that the approach was not an unusual one and served to expedite reaching a final draft, but Beissat grumbled that it was "undemocratic." Beissat further expressed the Polisario's disappointment that the United States did not support efforts to make the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination a primary aim of the resolution. Fortunately, he said, the final resolution included the principle. He added that the Polisario also felt betrayed by Spain, whose actions with respect to the resolution did not reflect the positions that Spanish officials had outlined to the Polisario in the lead-up to it. Nonetheless, Beissat made clear, the Polisario was generally satisfied by the resolution and would approach dialogue with the Moroccans in good faith. He opined, however, that the Moroccans were unlikely to take the discussions seriously, having already been "armored" by strong U.S. support.

SPECULATION ABOUT THE MEDIATOR

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¶3. (C) Beissat said it was "well known" that the Polisario did not think highly of UN Secretary General's personal envoy on the Western Sahara, Peter Van Walsum. Polisario Secretary General Mohamed Abdelaziz had communicated that view, he said, to Ban Ki-Moon. Beissat said the Polisario would attend the talks with the Moroccans regardless of the mediator the UNSYG selected, but he implied that their preference would be for a Scandinavian. While the Polisario had historically been most comfortable with an American

mediator like James Baker, Beissat said, this was now out of the question given the U.S. alignment with Moroccan views. Likewise, the Polisario no longer desired to hold the talks in the U.S. He said the Polisario would not object to a non-European mediator, but stressed that the mediator needed to be of sufficient international stature and immune to corruption by Morocco. Beissat explained that having a mediator of stature was important so that neither party could walk away from the talks without consequences on the international stage.

#### CHOOSING SIDES

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¶4. (C) Beissat said the Polisario leadership would select its delegation to the talks after consultations in May with UN officials. That said, he believed that Mohamed Khaddad and Ahmed Boukhari (Polisario representatives to MINURSO and to the UN in New York respectively) would "definitely" be part of the delegation. He observed that Mohamed Abdelaziz had special confidence in Khaddad in these matters. Beissat was unsure if the three other Polisario delegates to the Baker Plan talks -- Brahim Ghali, Rhadi Sgheir Bachir and Brahim Mokhtar -- would participate, but appeared to think it likely. As for the Moroccan side, Beissat stated a clear Polisario preference for a senior Moroccan delegation including individuals close to King Mohammed VI. He also asserted strongly that the Polisario did not want to see on the Moroccan delegation any "converts" -- former Polisario members who had gone over to the Moroccan side -- or members of CORCAS. The personal dynamics of the discussions would be far better, he said, if no Moroccans with direct ties to the Sahrawis or Western Sahara participated.

#### COMMENT

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¶5. (C) Beissat invited us to meet with him and was clearly probing for information on two specific issues: whether the U.S. has a particular agenda it plans to pursue with respect to the Polisario-Morocco negotiations (especially as regards backing the Moroccan autonomy plan); and whether we have a specific mediator/facilitator in mind. We told him we had no reason to believe that Washington had made any decisions in either respect. Overall, he was noticeably less belligerent than during our last meeting before the vote on UNSCR 1754, and confined his warnings to remarks about the need for the U.S. not to back the autonomy plan openly. It may be noteworthy that Beissat in this discussion referred repeatedly to a "popular consultation" as the outcome the Polisario desired for the Sahrawis, rather than specifically a "referendum." When we questioned him about that, he seemed to equate the two, but it was a departure from his usual rhetoric.

¶6. (C) Although Beissat caveated his views as those of a "junior diplomat," he noted that most every matter of significance to the Polisario leadership was on his radar screen given the importance of the Polisario's relationship with Algeria. Listing the activities his embassy was required to support, Beissat even mentioned military training provided by the Algerians to the Polisario. At another loose moment, Beissat mentioned that Mouloud Said, the Polisario representative in Washington, had been assuring the Polisario leadership until late in the process that the U.S. would maintain its express support for self-determination. When the U.S. draft resolution omitted mention of self-determination, Abdelaziz had been unpleasantly surprised. Beissat noted, perhaps jokingly, that Mouloud Said might not be in Washington much longer.

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